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FROM : AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN DATE: June 6, 1979

SUBJECT : Press Coverage of Congressional Staff's Report on "Jonestown."

REF : Georgetown 2498 ARA

Attached are copies of press articles concerning the House Foreign Affairs Committee Staff report on Peoples Temple and Jonestown, per reftel.

BURKE

Enclosures:

As stated.

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The Peoples Temple tragedy

THE LATE REV JIM JONES

THE recently published Staff Investigative Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the United States House of Representatives on the Peoples Temple tragedy is an interesting document for a number of reasons – but for two in particular.

To begin with the 782 page document highlights the problems in effectively investigating the tragedy in the remote jungles of Guyana.

And, secondly, it brings to the fore the well founded maxim that it is much easier to be wise after the event.

Like everyone else before November 18 last year, the investigators were hardly in a position to accurately assess what was taking place or whether anything was really going wrong at the Peoples Temple agricultural settlement in the North West District of the

Obstacle

As the investigators point out in their report when dealing with the role played by members of the U.S. Department of State personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Guyana were faced with the challenge of trying to take an objective view in the face of two opposing groups of Americans often presenting contradictory stories, a fact reinforced by numerous letters, articles and documents reflecting equally pro and con dimensions of Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple.

"Out of that maze, the U.S. Embassy concluded that the Peoples Temple prior to November 18 '78 was a controversial or unusual group."

In addition the investigators said it was "beyond doubt that Jones staged a show for selective visitors to Jonestown which made it difficult to get a realistic and

accurate picture of what was actually occurring there."

And to put fact that, as the investigators reported, Jones was "first and foremost a master of mind control", and that he practised with considered precision" a number of recognized brainwashing strategies, and one begins to understand what a complicated matrix one was dealing with.

Since November 18 however, everybody is battening over with hindsight.

However, an important point on which all those who have been vociferous in their condemnation should be pressed now in the abundance of their new wisdom is this: Taking all the given circumstances into consideration, had I been told one week before November 18 that 1,000 people together would commit suicide would I have believed?"

It is to the eternal credit of the investigators that they were frank and honest enough to admit that in reviewing their findings they were conscious that they were "the beneficiaries of retrospect on the events which preceded November 18 1978."

According to the investigators their findings as they related to the Peoples Temple involvement with the Guyana Government, were "investigate". They pointed out however, that the evidence suggested that the support extended to the Temple by Deputy Prime Minister, Cde Ptolemy Reid was "born of an ideological compatibility with and endorsement of the Temple's socialist philosophy."

IMPORTANT

The Guyana Government, has, of course, been stressing this all along. It has maintained that its working relationships with the Temple must be viewed in the light of its perception of the political community

in the Peoples Temple.

In their inquiries the investigators did surface hints that large sums of money and guns might have been smuggled past the local customs officials. The interesting feature here though is that the guns and money could have been illegally smuggled out of the United States, a country whose level of sophistication in terms of surveillance technology is far more advanced than Guyana's.

Another aspect of the report is a gripe that by the investigators that their inability to interrogate Guyanese Government officials had left their report with "a conspicuous void".

It is important that Guyanese understand why the investigators were not granted permission to interview Guyanese Government officials. Basically, there are two main reasons. Guyana has decided to conduct its own inquiry into the circumstances which led to the November 18 tragedy, and there was a serious breach of protocol on the part of Chairman of Committee on Foreign Affairs, Clement Zablocki.

In the first place Zablocki as chairman of the Foreign Affairs' Committee is the equivalent of the chairman of any parliamentary committee in Guyana. However, in his correspondence seeking permission for the investigators to interrogate Guyanese officials he breached protocol by writing Prime Minister Burnham directly.

Zablocki's letter was passed to Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cde Harry Dwett for his comments. And in his reply Cde Dwett explained that the Guyana Government had decided it could act as its own judicial inquiry.

He added "First and altogether apart from questions of protocol, some of those whom your staff may wish to interview, are very likely to be also required to testify before our own judicial inquiry. Secondly a neater and, possibly more convenient way for your committee to be supplied with their evidence would be through the report and findings of our own inquiry to be published in the case of necessity."

COMMENT

May I add that as far as our inquiry is concerned no overlapping is likely to occur because it is not contemplated that our inquiry will be seeking to interview government officials witnesses in the United States".

Mr Zablocki in his reply again chose to write directly to the Prime Minister. And again Cde Dwett was given the letter for reply. In that reply Cde Dwett again had cause to check on the question of protocol.

He explained ... we have difficulty in resolving the question of protocol concerning senior officials of the Government. We understand from your ambassador that even our Prime Minister is not to be precluded being in effect interrogated by investigators of an external governmental authority."

Those who know anything about how international diplomacy is conducted would verify that Guyana's stand was the correct one. It was a question of protecting the country's national dignity. And, it is to the credit of those concerned that permission was not granted for the country's dignity to be trampled on.

Probe committee findings reveal....

US Embassy felt Peoples Temple was 'unusual' group

SUPPORT extended to the Peoples Temple by Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, was apparently not generated for illegal reasons.

That was one of the "incomplete findings" of the Staff Investigative Group to the Committee on Foreign Affairs United States House of Representatives.

The investigators, on the side of the United States Embassy in Georgetown, in dealings with the Peoples Temple but noted that it had been very difficult to get a clear, factual account picture of what was happening at Jonestown.

However, in their report copies of which are still very difficult to obtain both in Washington and Georgetown, the investigators admitted that they were "the beneficiaries of hindsight as the events which preceded November 18, 1978".

The staff investigative group was mandated to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the international relations aspects of the activities of the Peoples Temple, the events that led to the murder of United States Congressman, Leo J. Ryan, and the mass suicide/murder of over 900 members of the Peoples Temple in the North West Region of Guyana last November.

Dealing with the support extended to the Peoples Temple by Dr. Reid, the investigators contended that while this support was "exploited" in the sense that "it had the ultimate effect of furthering Peoples Temple objectives, it did not appear to be generated for illegal reasons" but was born out of "an ideological compatibility with and endorsement of the Temple's socialist philosophy"

Committee chairman, Clement Zablocki, had requested admission for a number of Guyanese officials to the hearings. However, [illegible] because government had decided to set up its own inquiry into the disaster and it would be necessary for the same officials to give evidence.

And, in an exchange of diplomatic [illegible] published in the committee report, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mary Dyett, had [illegible] and stated [illegible] authority". An exchange [illegible] findings, there [illegible] procedures under which items consigned to the Peoples Temple were allowed into Guyana after only cursory inspection or no inspection at all.

In such circumstances, the investigators felt, the Peoples Temple could have brought large sums of money and guns into Guyana in suitcases and false-bottom crates. However, in their investigations they were apparently unable to discover how these items might have been shipped out of the United States in the first place.

ALLEGATIONS

They explained that the U.S. Customs Service, acting on allegations that weapons might have been shipped to Jonestown, launched an investigation in February, 1977 but this investigation was compromised one month after it began.

They alleged that a Guyanese Police Officer contributed to the compromising of these investigations by showing a copy of a Customs Service report which was sent the Guyanese Police by Interpol, to either Paula Adams or Carolyn Layton of the Peoples Temple and one of them passed on the information to Temple leader Jim Jones.

The investigators also reported that the U.S. Customs Service investigations were concluded in August 1977 after a shipment of crates destined for Jonestown was opened and inspected by the Customs Service in Miami in August 1977. "Shortly thereafter, a report on the investigations was filed with negative results", they explained.

But they added: "Nonetheless, investigators apparently felt enough residual suspicion to send copies of the report to Interpol and the U.S. Department of State because [illegible] investigation disclosed allegations that Jones intends to establish a [illegible] power base in Guyana and that he may currently have firearms in that country?"

CUSTOMS SERVICE

They also explained that while the standard routing procedures provided that a copy of the Customs Service report be sent to the U.S. Embassy in Guyana, there was no information that a copy was ever sent.

[illegible] on the Peoples Temple involvement with the [illegible]

[illegible] of her sexual encounters with the official and transcripts of these recordings were apparently made for Jim Jones who periodically turned them over to "high officials in the Guyana Government".

The report said that allegations that "uranium officials" of the Guyanese Government may have taken action to influence the outcome of the Stron custody case proceedings in the Guyanese court system were "incomplete and inconclusive"

In their 782 page document, the staff investigators also dealt with a number of other aspects related to the Jonestown disaster. These included the role and performance of the U.S. State Department, allegations about a conspiracy against Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple, Jones' tactics, the motivation of his followers, the intimidation of ex-members and the media, the using of public officials, and the slaying of the U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan.

And, in their sharp criticisms of the U.S. Embassy's dealings with the Peoples Temple, they contended that "the vital elements of common sense, and an honest and healthy skepticism" were absent from these dealings.

The embassy, they contended further, "could have exerted sounder overall judgment and a more aggressive posture" despite the acknowledged handicaps under which it worked.

"The U.S. Embassy in Guyana did not demonstrate adequate initiative, sensitive reaction to and appreciation of progressively mounting indications of highly irregular and illegal activities at Jonestown", the investigators said. They noted too that there was "a lamentable breakdown in communication" between

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PEOPLES TEMPLE

the embassy and the State Department.

They noted however, that there were a number of mitigating factors such as the fact that the embassy did not have an investigative and judicial function and the fact that its personnel were faced with the challenge "of trying to remain objective in the face of two opposing groups of Americans often presenting contradictory stories."

The latter factor, they said, was reinforced by numerous letters, articles, and documents reflecting equally, pro and con dimensions on Jones and the Peoples Temple.

"Out of that balance, the embassy concluded only that Peoples Temple prior to November 18, 1978, was a 'controversial' or 'unusual' group," they pointed out.

Another mitigating factor, they said, was the fact that "it was proven beyond doubt that Jim Jones staged a show for selective visitors to Jonestown. This made it difficult to get a realistic and accurate picture of what was happening at Jonestown.

They noted, however, that in the area of "crisis management" following the tragedy on November 18, the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Guyana "performed with distinction."

And, dealing with allegations that a female member of the Peoples Temple in Guyana had engaged in a sexual liaison with former U.S. Consul, Richard McCoy, and had made tape recordings of their sexual activities in an attempt to compromise him, they said that based on their findings, these allegations were false.

The investigators also noted that there seemed to be considerable misunderstanding in the minds of American officials about their country's Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act.

"Among the embassy officials interviewed, there is almost unanimous agreement that the Privacy Act is complex, difficult to understand and confusing. Accordingly, they believe that regular guidance is required to guarantee proper implementation" they reported.

And, in their recommendations to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives, the investigators suggested that the exemption provisions under the U.S. Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act be reviewed and that the country's Internal Revenue Service rules and regulations regarding churches be reviewed.

In addition, they recommended that the present system governing the dissemination of documents and information in the U.S. be reviewed that deficiencies in the interaction and coordination between the State Department's consular and political sections be corrected, and that every consideration should be given to increasing the availability of legal assistance to embassy staffs.

Other recommendations included the need for a concentrated programme of research and training cults, and the need for the subject of cults to be included on the agenda of the White House Conference on the Family.